

Ursula Taylor VC Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109597
Local Authority	Bedford
Inspection number	377949
Inspection dates	1–2 December 2011
Reporting inspector	Joseph Peacock

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	253
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alison Radmall
Headteacher	Lindsay Fraser
Date of previous school inspection	4 February 2009
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Age group	4–9
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 14 lessons and observed 12 teachers. They held meetings with the headteacher, governors and staff, talked to parents and children, and looked at school planning, assessment data and pupils' completed work. They assessed the quality of the school's documentation including minutes of governors' meetings, improvement planning and that relating to safeguarding and children's welfare. The inspectors scrutinised 121 questionnaires returned by parents and carers, and those returned by staff and pupils.

The inspection reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- Are the quality of teaching and the curriculum effectively meeting the learning needs of boys and helping them to improve their writing?
- What is the quality of day care provision in 'Active Kids' sessions and its impact on pupils' learning and development?
- Do the quality of care, guidance and support and community cohesion make a valuable contribution to pupils' personal development and their understanding of other cultures?
- In the Early years Foundation Stage, what is the impact of the quality of provision and leadership and management on children's progress in their Reception year?

Information about the school

The school is slightly larger than the average primary school. There are not always enough places for all those who wish to attend. Most pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average but the number with a statement of educational needs is below average. Few pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals. The school has Healthy School status. There is an outdoor swimming pool on site.

Day care is provided in 'Active Kids' sessions before school starts for one hour and after school from 3.30pm until 6pm. This is managed by the school and led by a member of the school staff. There are 65 pupils on the register but sessions are limited to 32 pupils to maintain a favourable ratio of pupils to adults. Seventeen pupils attended the breakfast club and 26 pupils attended the after-school club during the inspection.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good school which thoroughly deserves its reputation in the local area for the quality of the education it provides. The inspirational and caring leadership and management provided by the headteacher, supported by the deputy headteacher, successfully promote high aspirations amongst staff. This leads to a consistently good quality of teaching and learning. The effective curriculum includes motivating, interesting topics which are of particular interest to girls and boys alike. As a result, pupils enjoy school and outcomes are outstanding in many areas. Specialist teacher knowledge in information and communication technology ensures pupils have advanced skills when using computers. The expertise of the leader in the Early Years Foundation Stage has made a significant difference to the quality of provision in Reception. The previous issue over providing more practical experiences is now a strong feature of children's learning, exemplified by the 'Best Garden' award in the borough.

Attainment by the time pupils leave in Year 4 has mostly been maintained at above the nationally expected levels since the previous inspection. The school's data shows that the attainment of boys in writing at the end of each key stage is below that for girls. The school's introduction of strategies to promote better writing skills shows clear signs of success and is closing the gap, especially by Year 2 where it was widest. Children in Reception benefit from daily sessions to learn letters and sounds and have good opportunities to write in most activities. However, a scrutiny of the books of older pupils shows that opportunities to write at length in literacy and other subjects are limited. This means that pupils are not provided with sufficient opportunities to practise new skills or consolidate new learning.

Underpinning consistently good teaching is teachers' effective use of assessment to plan challenging work for pupils of all abilities. Higher-attaining pupils are usually well challenged. Similarly, the effective provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities results from support which is tailored carefully to meet individual needs. This ensures that most make good progress.

The caring staff provide an exceptionally nurturing environment for pupils, who feel perfectly safe and extremely well cared for. The high quality of day care is appreciated by parents and carers, and enjoyed by pupils. However, the inspectors identified weaknesses in health and safety procedures which staff and governors had not identified. The headteacher took immediate and decisive action to tighten procedures and ensure the safety of pupils. Pupils have excellent social skills and

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their behaviour is exemplary. Parents and carers, in turn, are highly satisfied by the school, which maintains an outstanding partnership with them.

Leadership and management are good. Staff and the governing body share a common ambition and vision for success. Accurate school self-evaluation and a determination to continually improve have resulted in some aspects being judged as outstanding in this inspection. As a result, the school has a good capacity for further sustained improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment in writing throughout the school by providing more opportunities for pupils to write at length in English and other subjects including topic work.
- Ensure that staff and members of the governing body monitor procedures relating to health and safety regularly and more rigorously.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Pupils' excellent attitude to learning, promoted from day one in Reception, ensures that all listen attentively and are keen to answer questions in lessons. Their concentration is consistently good and all work hard to complete the tasks set for them. As a result, most make good progress.

Standards of attainment are above the nationally expected levels in English and mathematics by the end of Year 4. However, the proportion exceeding the standards expected in writing is not as high as it is in reading or mathematics. Writing is a weakness for boys in Reception and at Key Stage 1 but the gap between them and the girls is closing rapidly by the end of Year 4. Effective strategies such as a big writing project and the emphasis teachers give to letters, sounds and spellings is beginning to narrow the gap in all year groups. However, there is limited evidence in English exercise books and topic books of pupils writing at length. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress. Detailed lesson planning ensures that teaching meets their specific learning needs. All receive effective support from teachers and teaching assistants.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are outstanding. Pupils are polite and show kindness and consideration for others. Their excellent behaviour is a key factor in how well they learn in lessons and how much fun they have together in the day-care sessions. All thoroughly enjoy school and this is reflected in their above-average attendance. Pupils take full advantage of the many opportunities offered to them by, for example, attending many of the clubs and sporting activities that the school organises. Street dance sessions before school are very popular and well-attended. Most pupils have an excellent understanding of staying fit and healthy, and

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of how to keep themselves and others safe. The school is an integral part of the local neighbourhood and pupils enjoy community activities such as performing with the choir and their close links with the church. Taking on additional responsibilities in school as school councillors, and planning and leading school assemblies on values such as respect, considerably extends pupils’ social development. Pupils gain a thorough appreciation of other cultures from curricular activities and from links with other schools and communities, both locally and internationally. Competent skills when using computers ensure that pupils are well prepared for their future learning.

These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes

Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils’ learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils’ behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Teachers and teaching assistants generally have high expectations of pupils and are totally committed to meeting their needs. All pupils know their targets for learning and are keen to achieve them. The much improved use of assessment information informs pupils’ of their next step in learning and is helping staff to provide them with challenging tasks. Staff also provide pupils with good opportunities to work independently or collaboratively with others in lessons. Year 4 pupils, for example, worked in groups, some in an air-raid shelter and others seated under tables, to investigate the role of women in World War Two. Strengths common to most lessons are: the rapport and relationships between staff and pupils, pupils’ excellent behaviour and the effective use of computers. Very occasionally, where teaching is less effective, some pupils find tasks too easy.

There is a strong emphasis on maintaining the pupils’ good literacy and numeracy

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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skills throughout the school. Curricular initiatives to improve writing, such as incorporating writing activities into topics and other subject areas are motivating pupils successfully to write. However, the frequency and length of pupils’ writing, evident from the scrutiny of work, shows that pupils in some classes have limited opportunities to practise their skills. The curriculum is enhanced by French lessons, opportunities to learn to swim in the school’s own swimming pool, residential visits and extra-curricular clubs such as street dance. The performances in school and the community and success of the choir add further to pupils’ enjoyment of school. In day-care sessions, pupils enjoy a good range of recreational activities, decided upon by the pupils themselves. A weekly timetable is not produced, making it difficult to assess the balance of activities for different subject areas or to allow parents to contribute information or resources.

All members of staff work as one team to ensure pupils are looked after well during the school day. This enables pupils to feel safe and become confident. Parents and carers are very positive about how well their children are looked after by the extremely caring and conscientious day care staff. All have appropriate qualifications in child care. ‘I have difficulty getting him to come home’ was a typical comment from parents. The school works with a wide range of partners with specialist knowledge and expertise. Consequently, provision for the very few pupils who may be more vulnerable is excellent. The contribution of the school’s partners also ensures that pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, successfully overcome barriers to learning. Transition arrangements into school and between classes ensure that pupils settle quickly and are happy. The school promotes attendance successfully and receives excellent support from parents and carers, who clearly value what the school provides each and every day.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils’ needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The highly respected headteacher and senior leaders work as an effective team. Their drive and determination successfully motivate staff to eliminate any weaknesses through regular and thorough assessments of their own and pupils’ performance. All are involved in carefully monitoring and evaluating pupils’ progress and the quality of teaching and learning. The governing body is well informed and has a very clear view of the school’s strengths and where improvements can be made. Governors are just as keen to see the school improve as staff. They use their wide range of expertise to challenge and support the school, playing their part in

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driving up standards and ensuring good value for money.

The school goes out of its way to ensure there is an outstanding relationship between staff and parents. This partnership is enhanced by the excellent way day care is led and managed. Parents’ and carers’ views are regularly sought and the school enjoys an excellent reputation in the local community and beyond. ‘Amazing school where pupils thrive,’ was a typical view. Safeguarding is satisfactory. The school took decisive action to implement more rigorous safeguarding procedures which were not identified by staff or governors prior to the inspection. The school has established strong links with a community in Uganda. This, coupled with lessons focusing on the celebrations in other world religions such as Diwali and Hanukkah, ensure that pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of communities beyond their own and of different cultures in this country and abroad. The school helps all groups of pupils to learn effectively.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

The solid foundations laid in Reception make a major contribution to children’s successful learning as they move through the school.

Children enter Reception with knowledge and skills that are below those usually seen. This is because, for many, communication and social skills are well below those normally expected for children of this age. The effective leadership and management of this key stage are instrumental in improving provision and driving up standards. Staff work well as a team to ensure that children’s individual needs are accurately assessed and that they enjoy the challenging activities provided for them. All make good progress in all areas of learning and enter Year 1 with skills in line with those

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expected. School data shows that in seven of the 16 areas assessed, children’s skills are above average and this represents outstanding progress for some, especially in their numeracy skills. Girls outperform boys in all areas. Writing remains a weakness for boys and children who have English as an additional language despite some good progress.

The close partnership between home and school ensures children are happy to come to school and settle quickly. There are high expectations for behaviour and the calm atmosphere for learning that these generate ensures class routines are soon established and children develop excellent attitudes towards learning. Teachers successfully plan activities which will interest and excite boys. For example, good use is made of modern technology and all children use computers confidently. Daily sessions to learn letters and sounds also effectively promote early reading and writing skills. As a result, the gap between boys and girls is closing by the end of Reception. Resources are used imaginatively indoors and out in the spacious and well-organised outdoor area. For example, the hot jungle and cold arctic areas are imaginative and successfully encouraged children to share, chat and write. Children particularly enjoyed feeling the frozen soapy ice cubes in the arctic area. All children were keen to make Christmas decorations such as lanterns, snowflakes or Santas and thoroughly enjoyed the creative workshops with Year 1 pupils. These workshops were well supported by parents. In all activities, there is a good balance between child-initiated and adult-led activities.

Parents unanimously agree that their children are kept safe and are happy in Reception.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

Almost half of parents and carers responded to the questionnaire. An overwhelming majority hold positive views about the school with unanimous agreement for seven of the 13 questions. Everyone who replied, for example, agreed that the school is well led and managed and that they are happy with their children’s experiences. Comments such as ‘superb’, ‘amazing’ and ‘brilliant’ are typical. Inspectors endorse all the positive views of parents and carers. There was a very small number of individual concerns such as school reports not being specific, too much jargon in reading records and not enough close supervision to make sure all food is eaten at lunchtime. The inspectors investigated these concerns but found no evidence to

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support parental views.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Ursula Taylor VC Lower School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 121 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 253 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	95	79	23	19	2	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	94	78	27	22	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	74	61	44	36	3	2	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	87	72	33	27	1	1	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	91	75	30	25	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	79	65	39	32	3	2	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	86	71	35	29	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	79	65	38	31	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	78	64	39	32	3	2	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	73	60	35	29	5	4	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	74	61	44	36	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	93	77	28	23	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	94	78	27	22	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



5 December 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Ursula Taylor VC Lower School, Bedford, MK41 6EG

Well done to all of you for working so hard and helping your school to improve. The inspectors really enjoyed their visit to your good school. We can see why your parents and carers say that you like school so much. Your teachers and their helpers work hard to make school exciting and a happy place for everyone. All of you behave so superbly in your lessons and around school. It was good to see how kind and thoughtful you are to one another and how well you played together in the popular Active Kids sessions. Your continued good attendance shows the inspectors how much you enjoy coming to school each day.

All of you are making good progress as you move through the school, achieving above the standards expected for your age in English and mathematics by the time you leave in Year 4. We hope that all the efforts your teachers are making to help more of you achieve higher standards in writing will pay off soon. We are asking your teachers to give you more opportunities to write at length to improve your skills even more.

The youngest of you do well in Reception and have lots of activities to enjoy in the classroom and outside. You did well to build the jungle and arctic areas. It was good to see how much you use computers and cameras when you are working and the inspectors thought that your Christmas crafts were fantastic. We are sure your parents will enjoy them when you take them home. We hope you continue to enjoy all your outdoor activities and try to win the garden competition for a second year!

The inspectors could see how proud you are of your school. Your parents and carers are just as pleased with your school, judging by their comments when we met them and their replies to our questionnaire. We do hope you continue to enjoy school, and help it to improve still further by working just as hard in all your lessons.

Yours sincerely

Joseph Peacock
Lead Inspector

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